

names) king-fisher, common and pied kingfisher, white-breasted water hen, night heron, pond heron, small and median egret, white-browed and red-whiskered bulbul, purple-rumped sunbird, little cormorant, redshank, common sandpiper, drongo (perhaps both the grey and the black), common green bee-eaters, redwattled lapwing, Grey wagtail, common grey hornbills (with their casques on the bill), common and jungle myna, golden oriole.

I might mention that an illicit liquor brewer has established himself at this pond and I suspect that because of his activities a lot of insects are attracted by his operation and the birds like the insects.

Finally, let us have a look at a comparatively undisturbed water body at Sasone. What I mean by undisturbed is that the activities of the humans, washing clothes and netting fish are in one corner of the tank and most of the area is left undisturbed for the birds. The natural vegetation too is not cut or uprooted. Apart from the birds mentioned in the other tanks, there are blackwinged stilts, ducks, whistling teals, snipe, wagtails and pipits and several others. Apart from the birds this year the pond provided a glorious sight in the way three kinds of water lilies and lotuses which bloomed in stages. Sasone in all seasons providing us with great pleasure.

INDIAN KOEL. S ASHOK KUMAR, Hyderabad

The Indian koel, (both male and female) was seen feeding on the berries of *Murraya koenigii* (Curryleaves plant) in my backyard garden. For the first time I have observed this type of feeding.

VIRGINIA'S ANNOYING VULTURES. JAMES DAO, INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE, 12 August, 2003

The day the vultures arrived here was a moment made for Hitchcock.

No one can say why they came. No one really saw them arrive. They were just there one morning last November, sitting in pine trees near the center of town. Hundreds of them. Black, beady-eyed and slightly menacing. Smelly, too. Roadkill smelly.

"It would take your breath away," said Thomas Adams, a local farmer whose girlfriend lived across from the vulture roost. "A barnyard smelled clean by comparison. They smelled like, well, dead animals."

Every day for five months, city officials battled to uproot the roost, exploding fireworks, spraying the vultures with water and finally chopping down trees. Nothing seemed to work. And then, as suddenly and weirdly as they had arrived, the vultures left, scattering one March morning like huge flocks of steroid-fed starlings.

But they did not go far. Many of them are now in some woods nearby, nesting and lurking, and local officials expect them to try to retake the town in the autumn. If they do return, the police intend to be ready with something more potent than a song: traps, and may be shotguns.

"We've got to do something, because they'll be back," said David Fields, a former marine who is the Animal Control Officer for Radford, an Appalachian city of 17,000 in the New River Valley.

As development spills into rural areas across southern Virginia, vultures aggressive, ugly, unappreciated, have joined white-tailed deer, coyotes, raccoons and skunks on the list of animals unwelcome in the suburbs.

Many ornithologists say Virginia has the second-largest vulture population east of the Mississippi, after Florida. Thanks largely to federal protection, the number is growing, though estimates are in dispute. Federal officials have put the number as high as 100,000. Conservationists place it lower.

As vultures have multiplied, they have also spread into suburbs and even cities. Vultures, it turns out, like being near people, with all the roadkill, livestock and landfills. "It is one of the side products of urbanization, just like storm runoff and air-quality degradation," said Bryan Watts, Director of Center of Conservation Biology at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. Several Virginia communities have roosts with 1,000 birds or more. Radford's is among the largest.

More vultures mean more complaints. In 1990, the Department of Agriculture's office of Wildlife Services in Virginia received only two complaints of property damaged by vultures. By 2001, the number had ballooned to 174, propelling vultures to third on the destructive-animal list, behind beavers and Canada geese.

The complaints have ranged from the grisly to the bizarre. Vultures are known to swoop down on newborn calves and lambs, peck their eyes out and even kill their mothers. From 1997 to 2001, vultures killed or wounded 392 farm animals, costing farmers \$133,305, the Wildlife Services Office reported last autumn. Black vultures are considered the main culprits, with less aggressive turkey vultures a milder nuisance.

The vultures have also attacked property, officials say, tearing off roof shingles, tractor seats and windshield wipers. Their droppings on transmission towers have caused power failures. For reasons that ornithologists have not figured out, vultures seem to be attracted to plastic and rubber items, like window gaskets and sheathing on power lines.

At a boat landing south of Richmond, complaints about vulture damage to boats and cars became so common that the federal government killed nearly 400 birds there last year. But local officials say more than 200 birds have returned this summer.

Then there is the psychic damage. Martin Lowney, the Director of Federal Wildlife Services in Virginia, said a family in southwestern Virginia complained that vultures were perched on their father's gravestone everytime they visited the cemetery. A woman reported that when she walked into a hospital room to receive counseling about cancer, two vultures alighted on the window ledge outside. "She lost it," Lowney said.

Citing such anecdotes, and concerns about the birds as nuisances, the Department of Agriculture asked the US and Wildlife Service last autumn for permission to kill as many as 4,000 black and turkey vultures in Virginia. The request has been reduced to 1,300; the application is pending.

The birds are protected under a 1918 law that restricts the killing of birds that migrate across national borders. Vultures once migrated between the United States and Latin America, though most of them in Virginia no longer travel more than a few hundred miles, experts said.